

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

wisdom and the prudence of her talk, the sweetness of her holy-conversation, nor tongue nor pen could easily describe. Those alone know it who experienced it. Not only her speech, but also her whole bearing had a strange power, whereby the minds of men were in such wise drawn to good and to delight in God, that all sadness was excluded from the hearts of those who conversed with her, and every mental weariness was driven out; nay, even the memory of all troubles departed, and so unwonted and so great a tranquillity of soul took its place, that each one, marvelling at himself, rejoiced with a new sort of joy, saying in his mind : It is good for us to be here, let us make here three tabernacles." We are surely back in the atmosphere of the *Vita Nuova*; not otherwise had Dante sung of his Beatrice in those golden sonnets of his youth; and even as the glorious lady of his mind " was called by many *Beatrice* who knew not what they were calling her," so many in Siena felt such delight in Catherine's childish wisdom and in her company " that, by a certain excess of joy, they took from her her proper name, calling her not Catherine but *Eufrosina*, nor know I by what instinct."¹ And even as " the name of that blessed queen Mary was in very great reverence in the words of this blessed Beatrice," so from her fifth year Catherine practised the most complete devotion to the Blessed Virgin, kneeling to salute her on every step as she passed up or down the staircase of her father's house.

To such a child, in such an age, visions began to come as a matter of course. She was in her sixth year when, as she returned with her brother Stefano from the house of their sister Bonaven-tura, and passed down the steep Vallepiazza towards the valley of Fontebranda, she looked up and saw, over the summit of the church of San Domenico, Christ seated on an imperial throne, clad in the papal robes, and wearing the tiara, attended by Sts. Peter and Paul, and the beloved disciple, John. He smiled upon her and blessed her, and the girl was absorbed in ecstasy, knew not where she was or what she did, until her brother, calling and pulling her by the hand, brought her back to the sounds of earth. ¹ *LtgenJa*, I. ii. z (§ 27) Cf. *Vita Nuova*, § § 2, 21.